

# Plastic has a greater value than we think

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Plastic often receives negative attention, primarily due to the issue of plastic litter. However, it is important to acknowledge that plastic adds value to our lives, often in ways that we may not fully appreciate.



From the manufacturing of polymers used to produce preforms and eventually plastic products, plastic holds intrinsic value, and that value does not necessarily diminish once a plastic product has served its purpose.

Safripol, a leading South African producer of polymer, recognises the importance of maximising the advantages of plastic through innovative solutions. The company is dedicated to enhancing the recyclability of plastic products and promoting its use in durable applications, where it outperforms alternative materials.

## The value of plastic to South Africa's economy

The Department of Trade, Industry, and Competition (DTIC) estimates that there are approximately 1,800 companies in the plastics industry across the country, employing over 60,000 individuals.

The industry's contribution to South Africa's total GDP and manufacturing GDP is 2.3 % and 20 % respectively.

These figures do not take into account the significant number of individuals who earn income from plastic-related activities, such as workers involved in the transportation of plastic products, as well as those in industries that rely on plastic components for their operations or the manufacturing of finished goods. In fact, nearly every sector and industry utilises or depends on plastic in some capacity.

## The value of plastic to our environment

It is undeniably challenging to recognise the environmental benefits of plastic, particularly when we encounter plastic litter in our streets and parks. However, it is crucial to use plastic responsibly, dispose of it correctly, and promote recycling.

By recycling, we can establish a circular plastics economy. Instead of using additional virgin plastic, various recycling methods can be employed to generate new products that incorporate recycled plastic. This approach enables us to decrease energy consumption and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

As an example, Safripol's Aspire® polymer grade is revolutionising bottle-to-bottle recycling in South Africa by incorporating a portion of recycled plastic. This means that the water bottle you purchase, and discard can be recycled, with the material being used to create a new bottle that will eventually be sold in stores again.

In addition, plastics can contribute to reduced fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions due to their lightweight nature. This is not only beneficial when used as packaging material for transporting goods, but also when utilised in car components. As electric cars often have heavier batteries, manufacturers are using more plastic parts in the car's body to offset the additional weight.

### **The value of plastics to the way we live**

We often acknowledge the convenience of plastic, but it is important to recognise its role in ensuring food safety and security.

Many individuals believe that there is an excessive amount of plastic packaging, particularly in the context of food, and some products are indeed overpackaged. However, plastic packaging plays a crucial role in preserving the freshness of our food and preventing rapid spoilage, thereby extending its shelf life. For example, a cucumber wrapped in plastic can stay fresh for up to 14 days, while an unwrapped cucumber stays fresh for about five days.

Without plastic packaging, we would end up throwing away many more times the amount of food than we already do. That means we would waste a lot of food that time, money, and energy have gone into producing.



**YOU WOULDN'T WANT YOUR  
LIFE DEPENDING ON A PIECE  
OF PLASTIC, RIGHT?**

Plastic is pre-sterilized and used in procedures to prevent infection. **PLASTIC IMPROVES LIVES.**

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### **The value of plastic to life**

Plastic enables safer medical care. Modern healthcare depends on plastic in many ways. Medical equipment like gloves, tubing, syringes, sample tubes, and small parts of heavy equipment, are all made of, or contain plastic. They are lighter, more durable, less expensive and come pre-sterilised where necessary to prevent infection or cross-contamination. For instance, a single surgical procedure in a hospital may require the use of up to 100 different plastic items, significantly reducing the risk of infection and making healthcare procedures safer and more efficient.

Moreover, plastic contributes to the overall safety of automobiles. Without plastic, essential safety features like airbags, seatbelts, and crumple zones would not exist. Up to 40% of the average car's body and components are made of plastic, and it is through plastic innovations that lives are being saved as vehicles become faster and traffic becomes more congested. The introduction of seat belts alone is estimated to have reduced fatalities in collisions by as much as 30%.

### **Plastic improves lives**

It is easy to overlook the value of plastic due to our perceptions of pollution and environmental issues. Yet plastic has transformed our world in numerous positive ways. Its durability, versatility, and adaptability have made it an indispensable material in nearly every aspect of our lives.

To fully harness the advantages of plastic while mitigating any adverse effects, it is crucial to make a dedicated effort to maximise its benefits and to minimise or eradicate any negative consequences.

Safripol is actively fulfilling these commitments by implementing innovative measures to promote the use of recycled plastic, thus playing a crucial role in safeguarding natural resources. Additionally, Safripol is actively contributing to the establishment of a circular economy for plastic by raising awareness about the importance of recycling and facilitating greater recycling efforts through support for buy-back centres and waste collectors. Environmental sustainability is at the core of Safripol's product development agenda.

Plastic can be seen as a problem only if we allow it to become one. However, when approached in the ways we have described, it can serve as a solution. Plastic improves lives.

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